

The Octopus Marooned—

By O. Henry

"A trust is its weakest point," said Jeff Peters.

"That," said I, "sounds like one of those unintelligible remarks such as, 'Why is a policeman?'"

"It is not," said Jeff. "There are no relations between a trust and a policeman. My remark was an epitaph—an epitaph—a kind of epitaph in parvo. What it means is that a trust is like an egg, and it is not like an egg. If you want to break an egg you have to do it from the outside. The only way to break up a trust is from the inside. Keep sitting on it until it hatches. Look at the brood of young colleges and libraries that's chirping and peeping all over the country. Yes, sir, every trust bears in its own bosom the seeds of its destruction like a rooster that crows near a Georgia colored Methodist camp meeting, or a republican announcing himself a candidate for governor of Texas."

I asked Jeff, jestingly, if he had ever, during his checkered, plaided, notched, pined and dappled career, conducted an enterprise of the class to which the word "trust" had been applied. Somewhat to my surprise he acknowledged the corner.

"Once," said he, "and the state of New Jersey never hit into a charter that opened up a soldier and safer place of legitimate octopusing. We had everything in our favor—wind, water, police, nerve, and a clean monopoly of an article indispensable to the public. There wasn't a trust buster on the globe that could have found a weak spot in our scheme. It made Rockefeller's little kerosene speculation look like a bucket shop. But we lost out."

"Some unforeseen opposition came up," I supposed.

"No, sir, it was just as I said. We were self-curbed. It was a case of auto-suppression. There was a rift within the loof, as Albert Tennyson says."

"You remember I told you that me and Andy Tucker was partners for some years. That man was the most talented conniver at stratagems I ever saw. Whenever he saw a dollar in another man's hands he took it as a personal grudge, if he couldn't take it any other way. Andy was educated, too, besides having a lot of useful information. He had acquired a big amount of experience out of books, and could talk for hours on any subject connected with ideas and discourse. He had been in every line of graft from lecturing on Palestine with a lot of magic lantern pictures of the annual Custom-made Clothiers' association convention at Atlantic City to flooding Connecticut with bogus wood alcohol distilled from nutmegs."

"One spring me and Andy had

been over in Mexico on a flying trip during which a Philadelphia capitalist had paid us \$2,500 for a half interest in a silver mine in Chihuahua. Oh, yes, the mine was all right. The other half interest must have been worth \$200,000 or \$300,000. I often wondered who owned that mine."

"In coming back to the United States me and Andy stubbed our toes against a little town in Texas on the bank of the Rio Grande. The name of it was Bird City; but it wasn't. The town had about 2,000 inhabitants, mostly men. I figured out that their principal means of existence was in living close to tall chaparral. Some of 'em were stockmen and some gamblers and some horse speculators and plenty were in the smuggling line. Me and Andy



"The whole town is listening to your side-kicker make a speech."

put up at a hotel that was built like something between a roof garden and a sectional bookcase. It began to rain the day we got there. As the saying is, Juniper Aquarius was sure turning on the water plugs on Mount Amphibious.

"Now, there were three saloons in Bird City, though neither Andy nor me drank. But we could see the townspeople making a triangular procession from one to another all day and half the night. Everybody seemed to know what to do with as much money as they had."

"The third day of the rain it slackened up awhile in the afternoon, so me and Andy walked out to the edge of town to view the landscape. Bird City was built between Rio Grande and a deep

wide arroyo that used to be the old bed of the river. The bank between the stream and its old bed was cracking and giving away, when we saw it, on account of the high water caused by the rain. Andy looks at it a long time. That man's intellects was never idle. And then he unfolds to me a instantaneous idea that has occurred to him. Right there was organized a trust; and we walked back into town and put on the market."

"First we went to the main saloon in Bird City, called the Blue Snake, and bought it. It cost us \$1,200. And then we dropped in, casual, at Mexican Joe's place, referred to the rain, and bought him out for \$500. The other one came easy at \$400."

"The next morning Bird City woke up and found itself an island. The river had busted through its old channel, and the town was surrounded by roaring torrents. The rain was still raining, and there was heavy clouds in the northwest that presaged about six more mean annual rainfalls during the next two weeks. But the worst was yet to come."

"Bird City hopped out of its nest, wagged its pin feathers and strolled out for its maternal foot. Let Mexican Joe's place was closed and likewise the other little 'dobe life-saving station. So, naturally the body politic emits thirsty ejaculations of surprise and ports hellum for the Blue Snake. And what does it find there?"

"Behind one end of the bar sits Jefferson Peters, octopus, with a six-shooter on each side of him, ready to make change or corpses as the case may be. There are three bartenders, and on the wall is a 19-foot sign reading 'All Drinks One Dollar.' Andy sits on the safe in his neat blue suit and gold-banded cigar, on the lookout for emergencies. The town marshal is there with two deputies to keep order, having been promised free drinks by the trust."

"Well, sir, it took Bird City just 10 minutes to realize that it was in a cage. We expected trouble; but there wasn't any. The citizens saw that we had 'em. The nearest railroad was 30 miles away; and it would be two weeks at least before the river would be fordable. So they began to cuss, amiable, and throw down dollars on the bar till it sounded like a selection on the xylophone."

"There was about 1,500 grown-up adults in Bird City that had arrived at years of indiscretion; and the majority of 'em required from three to 20 drinks a day to make life endurable. The Blue Snake was the only place where they could get 'em till

the flood subsided. It was beautiful and simple as all truly great swindles are."

"About 10 o'clock the silver dollars dropping on the bar slowed down to playing two-steps and marches instead of jigs. But I looked out the windows and saw a hundred or two of our customers standing in line at Bird City Savings & Loan Co., and I knew they were borrowing more money to be sucked in by the clammy tendrils of the octopus."

"At the fashionable hour of noon everybody went home to dinner. We told the bartenders to take advantage of the lull, and do the same. Then me and Andy counted the receipts. We had taken in \$1,500. We calculated that if Bird City would only remain an island for two weeks the trust would be able to endow the Chicago university with a new dormitory of padded cells for the faculty, and present every worthy poor man in Texas with a farm, provided he furnished the site for it."

"Andy was especial inrodded by self-esteem at our success, the rudiments of the scheme having originated in his own surmises and premonitions. He got off the safe and lit the biggest cigar in the house."

"Jeff," says he, "I don't suppose that anywhere in the world you could find three cormorants with brighter ideas about down-treading the proletariat than the firm of Peters & Tucker, Incorporated. We have sure hand the small consumer a giant blow in the sole apologetic region. No?"

"Well," says I, "it does look as if we would have to take up gastritis and golf or be measured for kilts in spite of ourselves. This little turn in bug juice is, verily, all to the Skibo. And I can stand it," says I. "I'd rather batten than bant any day."

"Andy pours himself out four fingers of our best rye and does with it as was so intended. It was the first drink I had ever known him to take."

"By way of liberation," says he, "to the gods."

"And then after thus doing umbrage to the heathen diabetes he drinks another to our success. And he begins to toast the trade, beginning with Raisuli and the Northern Pacific, and on down the line to the little ones like the school book combine and the oleomargarine outcraiges and the high-Valley and Great Scott coal federations."

"It's all right, Andy," says I, "to drink the health of our brother monopolists, but don't overdo the wassail. You know our most eminent and leathard multi-corruptionists live on weak tea and dog biscuits."

"Andy went in the back room awhile and came out dressed in his best clothes. There was a kind of murderous and soulful look of gentle riotousness in his eye that I didn't like. I watched him to see what turn the whiskey was going to take in him. There are two times when a woman takes her latest."

"In less than an hour Andy's skate had turned to an ice yacht. He was outwardly decent and managed to preserve his aquarium, but inside he was impromptu and full of unexpectedness."

"Jeff," says he, "do you know that I'm a creature?"

"That's a self-evident hypothesis," says I. "But you're not Irish. Why don't you say 'creature,' according to the rules and syntax of America?"

"I'm the crater of a volcano," says he. "I'm all aflame and crammed inside with an assortment of words and phrases that have got to have an exodus. I can feel millions of synonyms and parts of speech rising in me," says he, "and I've got to make a speech of some sort. Drink," says Andy, "always drives me to oratory."

"If you've got to get rid of your excess verbiage," says I, "why not go out on the river bank and speak a piece? It seems to me there was an old spell-binder named Canharides that used to go and disincorporate himself of his windy numbers along the seashore."

"No," says Andy, "I must have an audience. I feel like if I once turned loose people would begin to call Sen. Beveridge the Grand Young Sphinx of the Atlantic. I've got to get an audience together, Jeff, and get this oral distension assuaged or it may turn on me and I'd go about feeling like a deekle-edged edition de luxe of Mrs. E. D. E. N. Southworth."

"On what special subject of the theorems and topics does your desire for vocality seem to be connected with?" I asks.

"I ain't particular," says Andy. "I am equally good and varicose on all subjects. I can take up the matter of Russian immigration, or the poetry of John W. Frost, or the tariff, or Kabyle literature, or drainage, and make my audience weep, cry, sob and shed tears by turns."

"Well, Andy," says I, "if you are bound to get rid of this accumulation of verbiage, suppose you go out in town and work it on some indulgent citizen. Me and the boys will take care of the business. Everybody will be through dinner pretty soon, and salt pork and beans makes a man pretty thirsty. We ought to take in \$1,500 more by midnight."

"No Andy goes out of the Blue Snake, and I see him stopping men on the street and talking to 'em. By and by he has half a dozen in a bunch listening to him; and pretty soon I see him waving his arms and shouting at good-sized crowd on a corner. When he walks away they string out after him, talking all the time; and he leads 'em down the main street of Bird City with more men joining the procession as they go. It reminded me of the old legend of the Pied Piper of Hamelin, charming the children away from the town."

"One o'clock came; and then 2; and 3 got under the wire for place; and not a Bird citizen came in for a drink. The streets were deserted except for some ducks and idlers going to the stores. There was only a light drizzle falling then."

"A lonesome man came along and stopped in front of the Blue Snake to scrape the mud off his boots."

"Fardner," says I, "what has happened? This morning there was hectic gaiety afoot; and now it seems more like one of them ruined cities of Tyre and Siphon where the lone lizard crawls on the walls of the main portcullis."

"The whole town," says the muddy man, "is up in Sperry's wool

warehouse listening to your side-kicker make a speech. He is so grave on delivering himself of audible sounds relating to matters and conclusions," says the man.

"Well, I hope he'll adjourn, sine quo non, pretty soon," says I, "for trade languishes."

"Not a customer did we have that afternoon. At 6 o'clock two Mexicans brought Andy to the saloon lying across the back of a burro. We put him to bed while he still muttered and gesticulated with his hands and feet."

"Then I locked up the cash and went out to see what had happened. I met a man who told me all about it. Andy had made the finest two-hour speech that had ever been heard in Texas, he said, or anywhere else in the world."

"What was it about?" I asked.

"Temperance," says he. "And when he got through every man in Bird City signed the pledge for a year."

STUDENTS GO ON SONG STRIKE TO KEEP INSTRUCTOR

Holy Roller College Men Sing Nine Hours to Save Blind Pastor's Job.

NORTH BERGEN, N. J., April 2.—Armed guards patrol the property and grounds of the Holy Roller church and missionary college here. The town is tense with excitement.

The trouble started when the trustees decided to dismiss Rev. Ernest L. Whitcomb, blind pastor of the Church of Jesus, official name of the sect.

Students, boys and girls, resented the move. They didn't want Rev. Whitcomb let out, nor did they want Rev. Harold L. Moss put in charge, as the trustees decreed. The entire North Bergen police department made a sally on the church chapel because 100 of the students refused to stop their singing.

They had been singing for nine hours without a halt.

Song vs. Speech.

The music was intended to drown out an official announcement which Pres't H. D. Smith of the board of trustees was trying hard to make.

The announcement once delivered would remove Rev. Whitcomb and install Rev. Moss.

Smith finally had his little say, but only after every one of the students was marched down to the village police station and haled before a magistrate.

During their hearing on a disorderly conduct charge, the students continued their singing in the court room.

Following their arraignment the students seized the college buildings and dormitories.

They held forth for three days and nights and were only subjugated through starvation.

Then the students retreated to the home of their blind pastor and leader.

From Distant Lands.

Many of the Holy Roller students come from far-off lands. India and Africa are represented.

According to Miss Gertrude Harold, treasurer of the church and college, the board of trustees, headed by Rev. Whitcomb "because he was de-

parting from the tenets of the faith as laid down by Mrs. Gertrude Moss, its founder."

"It's not true," said Rev. Whitcomb. "I believe in demonstrative religion."

"And so do we," said the Holy Roller students, "and that's why we'll stand by thee to the end."

"Blue laws must surely fall. Only the gospel of Jesus Christ can make the world better."—The Rev. F. A. Hertwig, Detroit pastor.

American Navy Acting As Refugee's Guardian

CONSTANTINOPLE, April 2.—The American navy is acting as guardian to the Crimean refugees in the hospitals of this city, whose families have been separated from them. The absolute necessity of evacuating refugees from Constantinople has resulted in hundreds departing from the city and leaving kindred behind, ill in the hospitals.

The American navy has undertaken to keep track of all of the sick people thus separated from their families.

The number of sick is increasing. The Russian summer embassy at Buyk-Dere has been turned into a refugee hospital equipped by the American Red Cross. Such is the inadequacy of facilities for caring for the sick that in all hospitals available for refugees, more than half of the patients are sleeping on the floor.

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—but the ugly little duckling grew up to be a swan

BACK when trolleys were going to kill everybody and electric bulbs were mistrusted because they exploded when dropped, a gawky little industry was here and there timidly thrusting out its pole-line tentacles to a few arc lights.

Without money or credit, these puny electric light plants struggled for life with competition in towns and lived on hope out in the sticks—their own communities "sot" against them.

But such adversity is fitted to form character, to sharpen vision and to solidify purpose—and so it must have done in their case, too.

In a short space of forty years they have grown into national prominence as a most vital arm to our progress; and today bankers speak glowingly of the safety of their securities.

The Electric Light and Power industry needs consideration today—needs fair play, good will and, most of all, it needs credit.

That it is willing to pay for it, let us refer you to the interest rate on electric light securities. That it is able to pay and can safeguard its borrowings, let us ask you to try to recall when it had a panic, a strike, a severe reversal.

What is the money for? To expand and meet the present shortage of 3,700,000 horsepower needed now to bring the power and light supply up to the pressing demand.

Let us not forget that when a Utility asks for a loan, or an increase in rate, that it is in your employ—under control of your own commissions, and receiving a wage that you as a voter determine. Don't hamper yourself by hampering them.

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